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Gerry Foote, manager of production/projects Madawaska River/Shaw Falls (left) and human resources consultant Becky Fuller receive some tips on drumming from Algonquin elder Harold Ross after a traditional ceremony at the Bonnechere Algonquin Community office in Petawawa. For the story, please turn to page A8. For more community photos, please visit our website photo gallery at: www.thedailyobserver.ca.

■ **DRUMMING:** A show of friendship

Special ceremony



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PETAWAWA - A ceremony celebrating the unique relationship between a corporation and local Algonquins was held here this week.

The Bonnechere Algonquin Community hosted Ontario Power Generation to a sacred drum birthing ceremony at the offices of the Renfrew County and District Aboriginal Friendship Centre.

The brief ceremony recognized the role OPG has played in supporting the aboriginal awareness program. Two drums were specially crafted and presented to the company.

In the ceremony, which began with a cleansing ritual called smudging, elder Harold Ross instructed OPG employees Gerry Foote and Becky Fuller on proper drumming techniques.

Made out of wood and deer hide, the drum represents the circle of life, while the sound it makes represents the earth's heartbeat.

"It's a very important ceremony," said Mr. Ross. "The traditional drum is the centre of Algonquin culture."

Incorporated in 1977, the Renfrew County and District Aboriginal Friendship

Centre is a social service provider for off-reserve aboriginal people. They are mandated to provide health care, education, employment and housing.

"We're not necessarily a political entity, however, with our 6,000 members we are still involved in land claims and fisheries issues," explained Robert Guyea, director of the Bonnechere Algonquin Community.

OPG has been funding the aboriginal awareness program and other in-school programs for a few years now.

"We do contribute to many community groups and the Bonnechere Algonquin Community contributes greatly to this community and we're pleased to support them in any way we can," said OPG public affairs officer Jennifer Gardner.

Mr. Ross educates area students from Grades 3 to 6 on the history and tradition of Canada's First Nations. His teachings recount the story of the aboriginal peoples from their beginnings over 1,000 years ago to their first meetings with European settlers. He added he enjoys teaching because the current text books contain so much inaccurate information.

"The role of an elder is to teach," said Mr. Ross, adding that all stories were handed down from tribal elders as legends. "It's the path the Creator has chosen for me."

Sean Chase is a Daily Observer reporter